United Nations A/56/277

General Assembly

Distr.: General
8 August 2001

Original: English

Fifty-sixth session
Item 136 of the provisional agenda*
Pattern of Conferences

Excessive vacancy rates in language services at some duty stations and issues relating to the recruitment of language staff

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report contains an analysis of the current vacancy situation in language services at all duty stations, showing an overall improvement and a decrease in vacancy rates at all duty stations with chronic vacancy problems. The proactive approach which contributed to the alleviation of vacancy problems is described.

Vacancy rates nevertheless remain excessive at some duty stations, showing the limited impact of existing incentives to the mobility of language staff. A streamlined procedure for the lateral transfer of language staff is being introduced. Actions undertaken to fill vacancies in the recently established Interpretation Section at the United Nations Office at Nairobi are described in detail. The possible future implications of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 55/258 concerning the functional and geographical mobility of staff are noted.

Recruitment difficulties, whether language- or function-specific, are analysed. Possible causes for the low and apparently decreasing yields of competitive language examinations are reviewed. The success of past and current training activities aimed at increasing the yield of competitive language examinations is noted and the reinstatement of a training programme for interpreters is proposed. An inter-agency initiative to address the issue of training at its source through cooperation with educational institutions is briefly described.

* A/56/150.

** The footnote requested by the General Assembly in resolution 54/248 was not included in the submission.

01-50405 (E) 210801

I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in paragraph 11 of section IV of its resolution 55/222 of 23 December 2000, requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly at its fifty-sixth session, through the Committee on Conferences and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, a report on possible measures to alleviate the excessive vacancy rates in language services at some duty stations and to ensure the required quality of conference services Secretariat-wide. In paragraph 12 of the same section of the resolution, the General Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly, at its fifty-sixth session, a comprehensive report analysing problems relating to recruitment in language services at all duty stations and proposing measures to address them.

2. The present report has been prepared in compliance with both requests by the General Assembly, in view of the close relationship that exists between the issue of high vacancy rates and problems relating to the recruitment of language staff.

3. Section II below contains an update of the information previously reported in 1999 on the vacancy situation in language services at all duty stations;[1] an analysis of changes and possible trends observed since March 1999; information in response to the request by the General Assembly in paragraph 12 of section IV of its resolution 55/222 that the Secretary-General continue his efforts to implement the system of incentives to attract language staff to duty stations with high vacancy rates; and, lastly, an overview of the possible impact of high vacancy rates on the quality of language services and of safeguards put in place in order to minimize such impact.

4. Section III of the present report contains an analysis of issues relating to the recruitment of language staff and a description of actions already taken, or proposed, to address them.

II. Reducing excessive vacancy rates

5. A review has been carried out of vacancy rates at the four main United Nations conference servicing centres (Headquarters, United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON), United Nations Office at Vienna (UNOV)) as well as at the four regional commissions that have conference services of their own[2] (Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)) as at 30 June 2001. Its outcome is summarized in table 1, which also includes, for ease of reference, the vacancy rates reported to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.[3]

6. Table 1 shows that there has been a decrease since March 1999 in the total number of vacancies for all language services at all duty stations, resulting in a decrease in the aggregate vacancy rate from 10.3 per cent to 9 per cent. This reduction in the aggregate vacancy rate is indicative of improved effectiveness of recruitment efforts, especially in view of the unusually high retirement rates experienced over the past two years in the Spanish, French and, to a lesser degree, English and Arabic language services (for example, as a result of a large number of almost simultaneous early or normal retirements in the Spanish Translation Section at UNOG, the level of the vacancy rate briefly rose to over 33 per cent).

7. The pattern of vacancies among duty stations has evolved towards a narrowing of the gap reported in 1999 between duty stations with the largest language services, Headquarters and UNOG, and those with medium-sized or small language services. The aggregate vacancy rate for Headquarters and UNOG has improved from 8.6 per cent to 7.6 per cent, reflecting a sharp decrease at UNOG from 12.2 per cent in March 1999 to 5.9 per cent as at 30 June 2001 but a slight worsening of the vacancy situation at Headquarters, where the overall vacancy rate has increased over the same period from 7 per cent to 8.4 per cent. This situation reflects the fact that most vacancies in the language services at UNOG are filled by lateral transfers from Headquarters. At UNOV, the overall vacancy rate has decreased markedly, from 21.7 per cent to 16.9 per cent, but an excessive proportion of vacancies persists in the Interpretation Section. At UNON, the jump of the overall vacancy rate from zero to almost 16 per cent reflects the establishment, as of January 2001, of a permanent interpretation section pursuant to paragraph 24 of section B of General Assembly resolution 54/248 of 23 December 1999 (ongoing efforts to fill vacant interpreter posts at

UNON are described in paras. 8 and 9 below). At ESCAP, the vacancy rate in language services has remained lower than overall vacancy rates at Headquarters and UNOG. At ECA, ECLAC and ESCWA, vacancy rates have improved quite significantly, but remain excessive, at 25 per cent, 20 per cent and 22.2 per cent respectively.

8. As at 30 June 2001, the vacancy situation in the Interpretation Section at UNON was as follows: for the Arabic booth, all established posts (1 P-4, 3 P-3) were still vacant; for the Chinese booth, all established posts (1 P-4, 3 P-3) had been filled through career appointments (probationary) at the requisite levels; for the English booth, all established posts (1 P-4, 2 P-3) remained vacant; for the French booth, out of three established posts (1 P-4, 2 P-3), one had been filled through a fixed-term (11-month) appointment at the P-3 level and the remaining two had been filled through career (probationary) appointments at the P-2 level; for the Russian booth, all established posts (1 P-4, 2 P-3) had been filled through career (probationary) appointments at the requisite levels; and for the Spanish booth, all established posts (1 P-4, 2 P-3) had been filled through fixed-term (11-month) appointments, two at the P-3 level and one at the P-2 level.

9. Recruitment action taken since the establishment of a permanent Interpretation Section at UNON covers the remaining vacancies. It is described below.

(a) **Arabic booth**. Career appointments were offered to candidates listed in the relevant competitive examination roster and fixed-term appointments were offered to freelances either employed by the United Nations or known to the Organization who made applications in response to the vacancy announcements and who, after due evaluation, were found to meet the requirements of the posts. Each offer of appointment was made at a level commensurate with the candidate's previous experience, in accordance with established practice. All candidates rejected the offers. In addition, four external applicants (not previously employed by or known to the Organization) were brought to Headquarters and tested. One of them met the requirements for a fixed-term appointment, but rejected the level of the post that was offered to him. A new roster is now available following the competitive examination for Arabic interpreters held in January 2001. Offers are currently being made to candidates listed in that roster, giving priority to the filling of vacancies at UNON and UNOV.

(b) **English booth**. Before the recent completion of the selection process resulting from the examination held in January 2001, there were no candidates available from earlier competitive examinations. A sufficient number of candidates are now available. Offers are being made to them, giving priority to filling vacancies at UNON and UNOV. In addition, one interpreter from UNOG has recently volunteered for an assignment to UNON for a period of one year effective 1 January 2002. The required assignment action is in progress. His particular language combination will ensure coverage of interpretation from Russian.

(c) **French and Spanish booths**. Competitive examinations for both languages will be held in January 2002, with Nairobi as one of the examination centres. The freelance interpreters already working there under fixed-term contracts will be encouraged to take the examinations.

10. The difference in career prospects between large conference-servicing centres and smaller ones was identified as possibly the main cause of high or excessive vacancy rates in the latter in the report on career development in language services submitted to the General Assembly at its resumed fifty-third session (A/53/919).

11. At duty stations with large language services, decreasing but still fairly high aggregate vacancy rates can only be explained by recruitment difficulties and by the non-availability of suitable candidates (for example, in the case of interpretation, in the language combinations of French and Russian into English, no candidates meeting the requisite standard have been found since 1994 to fill vacancies throughout the system). Analysing such difficulties requires detailed information on the distribution of vacancies by language and by level of vacant posts. Table 2 provides the requisite information for translation services and interpretation services not only for the two duty stations with the largest language services, but also for the other two main conference-servicing centres (UNON and UNOV), where language services are provided in all six official languages (which is not the case at regional commissions). Data provided in the table point to language-specific difficulties in matching

the "yield" of recruitment exercises with high depletion rates resulting from early or normal retirement.

12. The system of mobility incentives for language staff referred to in General Assembly resolution 55/222 was identified in document A/53/919/Add.2 as potentially the most effective approach to reducing excessive vacancy rates in language services. The system then contemplated was to consist of non-monetary incentives likely to make reassignments to duty stations with excessive vacancy rates more attractive. Further consultations between the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services and the Office of Human Resources Management were carried out with the aim of defining a more specific set of incentives. However, given the need to ensure uniform treatment of language and non-language staff, particularly in the implementation of established rules governing placement and promotions, the scope for resorting to such incentives as giving more weight to mobility in the promotion process or guaranteeing reabsorption, with or without promotion, at one of the larger duty stations after a tour of duty at a smaller one is severely limited.

13. Despite such limitations, close monitoring of the vacancy situation at duty stations with medium-sized or small language services and a pragmatic, proactive approach have resulted in the significant improvements reported above, particularly in respect of the regional commissions, as reflected in table 1. A number of P-4 vacancies have been filled through the transfer and simultaneous promotion of staff members from Headquarters who, while fully qualifying for a promotion, would have had to wait longer for advancement if they had not exercised mobility. Vacancies have also been filled through assignments of one to two years, sometimes converted to outright transfers thereafter. Finally, a number of entry-level vacancies at smaller duty stations have been filled through the system put in place in 1996, whereby candidates successful in competitive language examinations may be initially appointed at any duty station following a six-month period of intensive training at Headquarters.

14. Two recent developments may result in further improvements of the vacancy situation at medium-sized or small duty stations. The first one is the introduction of streamlined procedures for lateral transfers of language staff. The streamlined arrangements, defined after extensive consultations within the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services and between the Department and the Office of Human Resources Management, were announced by the Under-Secretary-General for Management in April 2001. The arrangements provide not only for the effective exercise by the head of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services of his authority to transfer staff within the department, including conference services at UNOG, UNOV and (effective 1 January 2002) UNON, but will extend such authority, on a pilot basis, to language staff at regional commissions. The new arrangements will greatly facilitate and speed up lateral transfers of language staff, insofar as it will, whenever the "receiving" duty station is agreeable, obviate the need for a cumbersome review process. These arrangements are reflective of the "global" approach to the management of conference-services resources which the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services is mandated to provide.

15. The second development is the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 55/258 of 14 June 2001 on human resources management. In paragraph 1 of section V of the resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General "to develop further criteria for mobility to maximize its benefits for the Organization and to ensure the fair and equitable treatment of all staff and to avoid its possible abuse as an instrument of coercion against staff, taking into account job security in the Organization and other relevant factors, such as an appropriate incentive scheme and assurances of onward assignment". In paragraph 3 of the same section of the resolution, the General Assembly noted "the difference between mobility within a duty station and mobility across duty stations", and considered "that the latter should be a more important factor in career development". In paragraph 4, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General "to develop further appropriate mechanisms for promotion with a view to introducing adequate incentives for mobility between duty stations, including the possibility of promotion for staff subject to such mobility".

16. The requirements of language services will be given due consideration in the further development of criteria for mobility and of further mechanisms to provide adequate incentives for mobility between duty stations. Pending the further development of a mobility scheme, it would be premature at the current stage to

predict the possible impact of the emerging new mobility policy on the vacancy situation in language services. In any event, the close monitoring of vacancies and the proactive approach which have already resulted in a significant reduction of excessive vacancy rates will be actively pursued.

17. The overall vacancy situation may also be affected as a result of any decision that the General Assembly may take on the basis of the report which it has requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly at its fifty-sixth session concerning the implications of increasing to 62 the mandatory age of separation for staff members appointed before January 1990.

18. While a full and stable complement of experienced language staff at all locations would, of course, be the best guarantee of high-quality language services at all duty stations, one of the major ongoing priorities of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services is to maintain high-quality standards in language services, despite staffing difficulties, whether transitory or persistent. The capacity shortfall resulting from high vacancy rates in translation and interpretation services is offset through the recruitment of short-term staff against vacant posts. In the case of translation services, the shortfall may also be offset to a limited extent through outsourcing (contractual translation under special service agreements). Such practices have no significant impact on the quality of language services as long as stringent standards are applied in the recruitment of short-term staff (freelances) and contractors. Freelance interpreters wishing to be included in the pool of experienced interpreters shared among duty stations must pass a difficult test and subsequently undergo a period of close performance monitoring. Freelance translators hired by the United Nations are almost exclusively former staff members (retired or not) of the United Nations, the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, or other international organizations, with very extensive experience. (It should be noted in this connection that the limits imposed by the General Assembly on the United Nations earnings of retirees have increasingly become a serious obstacle to the efforts of the language services to recruit qualified temporary staff at all times when such staff are needed. The dollar amount of the ceiling ($40,000) has not been changed since 1996 and consideration might be given, as an interim measure, to revising the amount upward to take into account the inflation that has occurred in the intervening period.) The few freelances who have never been part of the established translation staff of the United Nations, a specialized agency or another international organization have been selected through a test, also followed by a period of strict performance monitoring. Contractual translators are almost exclusively drawn from the same pool as freelance translators. If not, they have been selected through the same testing/performance monitoring process. Additionally, insofar as they are expected to deliver final translations, contractual translators are subjected to systematic quality controls, performed by senior staff in translation services, the number of such controls varying according to the yearly workload of each individual contractor.

III. Issues relating to recruitment

19. As noted above, while insufficient mobility of language staff appears to be a main cause of persistently high vacancy rates at duty stations with medium-sized or small language services (and limited career prospects), the aggregate vacancy rate for all language functions at all duty stations is an indicator of the effectiveness of recruitment efforts. More specifically, as the detailed information in table 2 clearly shows, the persistence of "pockets" of vacancies for some languages (or language combinations) points to the need to improve the "yield" of recruitment exercises and to conduct in-house training.

20. For all language functions, staff at the P-2 or P-3 levels are recruited exclusively through competitive examinations. A competitive examination is planned whenever projections of vacancies at all duty stations so warrant. Forthcoming examinations are advertised worldwide, through the media and the United Nations web site, United Nations information centres, professional associations and schools of interpretation and translation, and are open to applicants meeting specific requirements in terms of educational background, knowledge of languages and professional experience. After applicants have been screened on the basis of such requirements, examination centres are set up at various locations depending on the number and place of residence of the applicants selected; it is not uncommon for the written part of a language examination to be administered simultaneously in 20 or

30 cities around the world. Candidates having successfully completed the language part of an examination are further screened through a competency-based interview process. Candidates proposed for recruitment are placed on a roster from which vacancies in relevant language functions are filled.

21. Since the overall passing score for competitive language examinations is set in accordance with Article 101 of the Charter of the United Nations, which requires that the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity be the paramount consideration in the employment of staff, the "yield" of such examinations bears no relation to the number of vacancies to be filled. A roster of successful candidates may provide an excessively large recruitment pool or, conversely, a pool so limited that it does not even meet immediate recruitment needs.

22. Over the past few years, a downward trend in the yield of language examinations has been observed, especially for some languages or language combinations. Compounding this trend, the proportion of successful candidates declining initial offers of appointment or indicating that they are no longer interested in working for the United Nations appears to be on the rise.

23. The yield of a competitive examination is a function of both the number of applicants meeting minimum requirements for being convoked to sit for the examination and the quality of such applicants. Table 3 illustrates the highly selective nature of competitive language examinations. It also shows the unpredictability of the yield of examinations. The figures in the table, however, do not reflect the persistent difficulties in ensuring that certain language combinations are sufficiently represented among successful candidates. Chronic difficulties have been encountered in finding interpreters capable of working from French and Russian into English and from English and Russian into French. There have been similar difficulties finding translators capable of translating from Arabic into other official languages, particularly those (English and French) from which "relay" translation into the other three official languages is feasible.

24. To alleviate recruitment difficulties for sought-after language combinations, competitive examinations open only to candidates with such combinations have been organized, sometimes with disappointing results. The practice is nevertheless being continued; for example, a competitive examination for English interpreters capable of working from Russian is planned for early 2002 for the candidates being trained in-house in the autumn as well as for other applicants; an examination for English translators capable of translating from Arabic will be given in February 2002, and a similar examination for French translators may also be held in 2002 if the competitive examination scheduled for September 2001 does not produce a significant number of successful candidates proficient in Arabic. However, efforts have been made and will continue to be made to better target language schools, institutions and professional associations that could provide candidates possessing such language combinations.

25. The causes of the decreasing numbers of qualified applicants for language examinations and of successful candidates are difficult to pinpoint. The declining interest in United Nations language examinations is certainly attributable in part to market factors. Education systems in countries around the world produce a limited number of language experts with the requisite qualifications to work for international organizations, and the United Nations may not be in the best position to compete for that limited pool with other international organizations offering more attractive conditions of service. This assumption could only be verified through a survey that is beyond the scope of the present report, but appears to be supported by the finding that a significant, and seemingly growing, proportion of candidates convoked for language examinations do not actually sit for the examinations (see table 3), and the even more revealing finding that many successful candidates decline all offers of appointment made by the United Nations.

26. The initial response to declining numbers of applicants and yields has been to increase the frequency of competitive examinations. However, administering a competitive examination is a cumbersome and costly process, both for the Office of Human Resources Management and for the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. Increasing the frequency of examinations entails significant costs and is likely to decrease in effectiveness over time, as repeatedly tapping the same limited reserve of potentially qualified applicants is bound to produce diminishing returns.

27. It is therefore necessary to address the other factor affecting the yield of competitive language examinations, namely the quality of applicants, particularly for interpretation, as the yields reported in table 3 show.

28. The perceived decline in the quality of applicants for language examinations may be attributed primarily to the nature of the training received by language specialists in educational institutions. While it may be of excellent quality for other language professions for which there is a strong demand, that training appears to be in some respects ill-suited to the special and stringent requirements of the United Nations and of other international organizations for multilingual staff proficient in their specific official languages.

29. For interpretation, remedial action would involve reinstating a training programme established in 1974 to address recruitment difficulties, which was suspended in 1992 owing to financial constraints. The programme would, as in the past, be open to candidates from competitive interpreter examinations whose overall scores were lower than the passing score, but high enough to warrant their selection for a period of intensive in-house supplementary training, in preparation for the next competitive examination. It should be noted that, unlike the case of translation, on-the-job training is not an option for interpretation because of the very nature of the work involved, where interpreters are expected to deliver a finished, rather than a semi-finished, product daily.

30. In the 18 years of its existence, the programme demonstrated a success rate exceeding 90 per cent. After completing an average of three to four months of training, 76 trainees became staff interpreters providing interpretation into French (23), English (22), Arabic (21) and Spanish (10). Special arrangements have been in place in China and the Russian Federation for the training of Chinese and Russian interpreters. A sufficient number of qualified candidates for recruitment are still available as a result of the most recent competitive examinations for these two language groups.

31. Under the proposed reinstated programme, the duration of training would normally be three months, with the possibility of an extension for an additional three-month period. Training would take place at Headquarters. It would include a two-week course taught by a senior member of the Interpretation Service on the methodology of interpretation and an introduction to interpretation at the United Nations. After this two-week period, trainees would work mostly independently, but under the guidance and supervision of other senior interpreters in mock meetings, using tapes and written materials and attending regular meetings. After completion of the training, candidates would be required to sit for the regular competitive examination for United Nations interpreters. When offered the training, candidates would be informed that, should they be successful in the competitive examination, they would be required to serve the Organization for a minimum period of two years. Trainees would be offered a three-month fixed-term contract as Interpreter Trainee at an entry level commensurate with their qualifications and experience. If they were non-locally recruited, they would receive an assignment grant for 30 days.

32. On the basis of the results of the January 2001 examination for English interpreters, four candidates who work from French and Russian have been identified as suitable trainees. As of 1 August 2001, they are being trained according to the programme guidelines indicated above. The cost of their fixed-term contracts is being financed from general temporary assistance resources. Since the most intensive component of their training, the two-week introductory course, will take place during the month of August, when interpretation demand is very low, training is being provided by an English senior interpreter within available capacity.

33. The results of the January 2001 examination indicate that there is no immediate need to organize training for Arabic interpreters. An examination for French interpreters will be held in early 2002. Depending on the results, it will then be determined if there is a need to organize in-house training for French interpreters working from English and Russian.

34. Given their scope, training activities foreseen at this time will be implemented within the approved level of the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001. Any additional resources warranted would be reported in the context of the second programme budget performance report, in the light of overall meeting activity and the resulting demand for interpretation services.

35. The General Assembly may wish to approve the training initiative described above for an initial period

of one year, subject to the submission to the Assembly, at its fifty-seventh session, through the Committee on Conferences, of information on the results of the training activities undertaken, the continuing need for the programme and related financial arrangements.

36. In the case of translation, there seems to be no immediate need for a training programme similar to the one proposed for interpreters, especially in view of the fact that on-the-job training is indeed an option for translators and is resorted to when promising candidates have been identified through a test for the selection of contractual translators. Under this arrangement, candidates who have taken the test who are not proficient enough to be included in the roster of contractual translators but show good potential may be recruited as entry-level freelances for short periods during which, while doing regular translation work under close supervision, they undergo intensive on-the-job training aimed at increasing their chances of success in a forthcoming competitive examination. The arrangement entails minimal costs, as trainees are productive during their training period, and it has yielded encouraging results. For example, three out of the 11 candidates successful in the latest competitive examination for French-language translators, editors and precis-writers had been so trained. The only formal training programme ever undertaken for translators was the training programme for African translators established in the late 1970s to remedy a chronic and very severe vacancy problem at ECA. The programme, funded under the ECA section of the programme budget, was designed to provide intensive training to promising African candidates selected through a screening examination. The training was aimed at preparing participants over a six-month period for competitive examinations for the recruitment of Arabic, English and French translators. Participants who were successful in a competitive examination were required to serve at Addis Ababa for a minimum of five years. The programme, which had been reasonably successful, was discontinued in 1996 owing to financial constraints.

37. The hope that the introduction in 1999, on an experimental basis, of common examinations for the recruitment of editors, translators and verbatim reporters (resulting in a single roster for the three functions) would facilitate the recruitment of editors and verbatim reporters by offering improved career prospects through functional mobility was not fulfilled. The experience of three common examinations shows that, in practice, successful candidates tended to repeatedly refuse offers of appointment in editorial or verbatim reporting services, preferring to await an opening in translation services. This shortcoming, together with some others, has led to the discontinuation of common examinations in favour of jointly held examinations for the three functions, which will produce three separate rosters of successful candidates. While holding the three discrete examinations within the same three-day period will retain some of the benefits of common examinations, notably economies of scale and the ability for multi-talented candidates to sit for all three, it will also help to alleviate recruitment difficulties currently experienced in some editorial units. It is also expected that joint examinations will attract more candidates than common examinations, as there are indications that requiring candidates to demonstrate proficiency in three significantly different functions, including one (verbatim reporting) almost unique to the United Nations, had a deterrent effect on potential applicants.

38. The various initiatives and proposals described above to improve the yield of competitive language examinations would, of course, be unnecessary if educational institutions responsible for training language specialists offered curricula better suited to the special requirements of the United Nations and other international organizations. In addition, the high success rates of training programmes conducted in the past by the United Nations, achieved through fairly brief training sessions, indicates that relatively minor adjustments to curricula would be sufficient to increase the number of graduates capable of succeeding in United Nations competitive examinations. Attacking the training problem at its root rather than through remedial action is an option which was given very serious consideration at the Inter-Agency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications held at Geneva from 3 to 6 July 2001. At the meeting, sponsored by the United Nations and attended by managers of conference services in all the specialized agencies of the United Nations system as well as major non-United Nations international organizations, including the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, it was decided to establish a working group which will promote cooperation between international

organizations and major educational institutions engaged in the training of language specialists. The aim is to better inform faculty and students about language professions in international organizations and eventually to launch joint pilot projects expected to result in the adjustment of existing curricula or the establishment of special training paths. The United Nations Secretariat is actively participating in the initiative. Member States will be kept fully informed regarding the progress of this initiative.

Notes

[1] Vacancy rates as at 31 March 1999 were reported to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session in document A/53/919/Add.2 of 26 May 1999, entitled "Career development in language services — Reducing excessive vacancy rates at some duty stations: the possibility of introducing a system of managed assignment".

[2] The conference-servicing requirements of the Economic Commission for Europe are met by UNOG.

[3] A/53/919/Add.2, table 1.

Table 1
Overview of vacancy rates in language services as of 30 June 2001 (Professional posts)[a]

Duty station/language service	*Number of vacancies/ number of posts*	*Vacancy rates 30 June 2001, %*	*Vacancy rates 31 March 1999, %*
Headquarters			
Translation and editorial	38/361	10.9	8.9
Interpretation	7/119	5.9	4.2
Verbatim reporting	0/53	0	0
Total for duty station:	**45/533**	**8.4**	**7**
United Nations Office at Geneva			
Translation and editorial	15/170	8.8	12.2
Interpretation	0/84	0	11.9
Total for duty station:	**15/254**	**5.9**	**12.2**
United Nations Office at Nairobi			
Translation and editorial	0/24	0	0
Interpretation[b]	7/20	35	-
Total for duty station:	**7/44**	**15.9**	**0**
United Nations Office at Vienna			
Translation and editorial	6/45	13.3	23.1
Interpretation	5/20	25	17.6
Total for duty station:	**11/65**	**16.9**	**21.7**
Economic Commission for Africa			
Translation and editorial[c]	2/8	25	33
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific			
Translation and editorial	1/20	5	10
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean			
Translation and editorial	2/10	20	40
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia			
Translation and editorial	2/9	22.2	55.5
Total	**85/943**	**9**	**10.3**

[a] Excluding posts of chiefs of service/section. In the case of UNON, posts funded on a recurring basis from extrabudgetary resources have been included.
[b] Including posts encumbered under 11-month fixed-term contracts.
[c] Excluding posts not located at ECA headquarters.

Table 2

Distribution by language and level of vacancies in translation and interpretation services at the four main United Nations conference-servicing centres

(Professional posts)[a]

A. Translation

Language	*Vacancies: number of posts*	*Level of vacant posts*	*Vacancy rate, %*
Arabic			
Headquarters	8/61	5 P-3, 3 P-4	13.1
UNOG	1/23	1 P-5	4.3
UNON	0/4	-	0
UNOV	1/5	1 P-3	20
Total	**10/93**	**1 P-5, 3 P-4, 6 P-3**	**10.75**
Chinese			
Headquarters	5/63	5 P-4	7.9
UNOG	0/20	-	0
UNON	0/3	-	0
UNOV	0/5	-	0
Total	**5/91**	**5 P-4**	**5.5**
English			
Headquarters	3/23	1 P-3, 2 P-4	13
UNOG	0/15	-	0
UNON	0/2	-	0
UNOV	1/3	1 P-4	33.3
Total	**4/43**	**3 P-4, 1 P-3**	**9.3**
French			
Headquarters	5/55	5 P-4	9.1
UNOG	6/35	2 P-5, 1 P-4, 3 P-3	17.1
UNON	0/4	-	0
UNOV	0/10	-	0
Total	**11/104**	**2 P-5, 6 P-4, 3 P-3**	**10.6**
Russian			
Headquarters	0/50	-	0
UNOG	1/37	1 P-3	2.7
UNON	0/4	-	0
UNOV	0/6	-	0
Total	**1/97**	**1 P-3**	**1**
Spanish			
Headquarters	13/49	13 P-4	26.5
UNOG	7/25	4 P-3, 3 P-4	28
UNON	0/4	-	0
UNOV	1/10	1 P-3	10
Total	**21/88**	**16 P-4, 5 P-3**	**23.86**

[a] Excluding posts of chiefs of service/section. In the case of UNON, posts funded on a recurring basis from extrabudgetary resources have been included.

B. Interpretation

Language	*Vacancies: number of posts*	*Level of vacant posts*	*Vacancy rate, %*[a]
Arabic			
Headquarters	2/22	2 P-3	9.1
UNOG	0/12	-	0
UNON	4/4	1 P-4, 3 P-3	100
UNOV	2/4	2 P-4	50
Total	**8/42**	**3 P-4, 5 P-3**	**19**
Chinese			
Headquarters	0/20	-	0
UNOG	0/12	-	0
UNON	0/4	-	0
UNOV	1/4	1 P-3	25
Total	**1/40**	**1 P-3**	**2.5**
English			
Headquarters	3/20	3 P-3	15
UNOG	0/17	-	0
UNON	3/3	1 P-4, 2 P-3	100
UNOV	2/3	1 P-3, 1 P-4	66.7
Total	**8/43**	**2 P-4, 6 P-3**	**18.6**
French			
Headquarters	1/20	1 P-3	5
UNOG	0/17	-	0
UNON	0/3	-	0
UNOV	0/3	-	0
Total	**1/43**	**1 P-3**	**2.32**
Russian			
Headquarters	0/17	-	0
UNOG	0/15	-	0
UNON	0/3	-	0
UNOV	0/3	-	0
Total	**0/38**	**-**	**0**
Spanish			
Headquarters	1/20	P-3	5
UNOG	0/11	-	0
UNON	0/3	-	0
UNOV	0/3	-	0
Total	**1/37**	**1 P-3**	**2.7**

[a] For UNON, rates take into account posts encumbered under 11-month fixed-term contracts.

Table 3
Statistical information on recent competitive language examinations

A. Translation

Examination	*Number of candidates convoked*	*Number of candidates who sat for the examination*	*Successful candidates*
1999 examination for Spanish translators, editors and verbatim reporters	462	462	21
2000 examination for English translators/precis-writers, editors and verbatim reporters	277	154	23
2000 examination for French translators/ precis-writers, editors and verbatim reporters	230	171	11
2001 examination for Chinese translators, editors and verbatim reporters	285	251	Not yet available

B. Interpretation

Examination	*Number of candidates convoked*	*Number of candidates who sat for the examination*	*Successful candidates*
1998 examination for English interpreters	37	31	5
1998 examination for Arabic interpreters	34	32	5
2000 examination for English interpreters[a]	11	7	0
2000 examination for French interpreters	50	40	15
2000 examination for Spanish interpreters	126	105	11
2001 examination for English interpreters	84	51	7
2001 examination for Arabic interpreters	107	83	8

[a] The examination was open only to candidates working from French and Russian.